

Understanding the Neurodivergent Student:

Twice Exceptional

A twice-exceptional (2E) student is an intellectually gifted child who also has one or more learning or neurodevelopmental challenges, such as dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD).¹



Facts About Twice-Exceptional Students²

360,000

students are estimated to be twice exceptional, which is 2–5% of gifted children.

~1 in 9 students

(10.8%) in gifted programs could be considered “twice exceptional,” meaning approximately 17–18% more students with IEPs should be identified for a gifted program.

They are among the most underidentified and underserved populations in schools because of a misperception of their talents, with their conditions often masking one another.



Key Traits of an Individual Who Is Twice Exceptional

2E students can be hard to identify, making it challenging to know how to meet their varied needs.¹ Their traits often resemble those of other conditions, and schools may not recognize the giftedness aspect of their condition or vice versa.

While characteristics of 2E students are individualized and varied, here are some to consider: ^{1,3,4}

- Outstanding critical-thinking and problem-solving skills
- Strong sense of curiosity
- Deep concentration in areas of interest
- Above-average sensory sensitivity (e.g., sounds, tastes, smells)
- Social skill and executive function challenges
- Potential for low self-esteem, often related to a sense of perfectionism
- Notable peaks and valleys in their cognitive test profile
- Behavioral issues linked to underlying stress, boredom and lack of motivation



Supports that Help 2E Students

The best way to support students who are twice exceptional is to be alert to the possibility and presence of co-occurring conditions so individuals can be identified and connected with appropriate support programs. Because many of their needs overlap with those of students with ASD and ADHD, such as sensory sensitivities or focus challenges, many of the accommodations that help those children can be effective.^{1,5}

Some specific school-based supports to try include:

- Developing and implementing individualized programs based on students' interests and talents
- Utilizing a strengths-based approach that considers the whole child
- Collaborating with other professionals in gifted education, special education or counseling for a holistic viewpoint and coordination of interventions
- Coaching in executive functioning skills (such as how to use a planner, break down large assignments into smaller tasks, etc.)
- Maintaining a patient approach that gives them time to process their thoughts
- Celebrating successes and focusing on positive reinforcement



Resources to Help 2E Students

Wondering how you can better support students who are twice exceptional?

Here are some resources to consult:



2Enews, which provides readers with high-level information and perspectives about twice-exceptional education and cognitive diversity.



The Davidson Institute's Educators Guild, a free online community for educators committed to meeting the unique needs of highly gifted students, including those who are twice exceptional.



Industry leaders like Pearson offering professional resources and tools, such as the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT3) and the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children | Fifth Edition (WISC-V).

**The Pearson Digital Assessment Library offers unlimited access to numerous assessments in an intuitive digital format, which can be particularly useful when working with 2E students who may need multiple assessments.*

“For years, the common language of *disability* suggested something broken that needed to be fixed. But now we understand that these are *differences* to be understood and supported.”

Kara Canale

Certified school psychologist and clinical assessment consultant at Pearson



Sources:

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2. <https://www.mdpi.com/2227-7102/14/10/1048>
3. <https://childmind.org/article/twice-exceptional-kids-both-gifted-and-challenged/>
4. https://giftedcertificationclass.weebly.com/uploads/4/2/2/0/4220848/operational_definition_of_twice-exceptional_learners_implications_and_applications.pdf
5. <https://sethperler.com/child-2e-twice-exceptional-ultimate-guide/>